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ABSTRACT

A total of 516 teachers in 25 school systems in Middle Tennessee responded to a questionnaire relating to their attitudes about the Career Ladder Program in Tennessee. The program delineates a five-step classification system: (1) probationary teachers; (2) apprentice teachers; (3) career level I teachers; (4) career level II teachers; and (5) career level III teachers. About half of the teachers surveyed believed that the program will improve the quality of instruction in Tennessee public schools. However, most teachers did not think that the program will necessarily attract more qualified individuals into the teaching profession nor serve as an incentive for educators to remain in the field. About 85 percent of the teachers felt that the program will cause morale problems because of the pay differentials, but 40 percent stated that they had become better teachers because of the career ladder program. While most respondents felt that prospective teachers should be required to pass a competency examination, most did not believe that those presently teaching should be required periodically to pass a test measuring their knowledge and skills in their content area. Most teachers did not report that fair evaluations were likely to occur in their school system. (CB)

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A STUDY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE CAREER LADDER PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS

A Research Study Presented
at the Fourteenth Annual Meeting
of the Mid-South Educational Research
Association in Biloxi, Mississippi, on
November 7, 1985

by

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A STUDY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE
CAREER LADDER PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS

INTRODUCTION

Tennessee was among the first states in the nation to enact a career ladder program as a part of the trend for educational reform. The Comprehensive Education Reform Act of 1984 was signed into law on March 6, 1984. This law provides for pay incentives for teachers who enter the program by meeting criteria such as teaching experience, proficiency examinations, observations, and other evaluative techniques. The career ladder program delineates a five-step classification system:

1. Probationary Teachers. First-year teachers who will receive state certification after a positive evaluation and a recommendation from their local school board.

2. Apprentice Teachers. After probation, teachers will serve a three-year apprenticeship and receive an annual supplement of $500 as an incentive to stay in the teacher profession. They will be evaluated each year by their local school boards. After completing the third year, they must receive tenure and move to the next level or lose their jobs.

3. Career Level I Teachers. Certification at this level lasts for five years, and teachers receive an annual supplement of $1,000. In addition to their usual duties, teachers will supervise student interns and probationary teachers. A teacher must have served three years as an apprentice teacher to qualify for Career Level.

4. Career Level II Teachers. Certification at this level five years, teachers are eligible for $2,000 and $4,000 annual salary supplements with 10-month and 11-month contracts, respectively. These teachers will work with remedial and gifted students, as well as supervise apprentice teachers. A teacher must have served five years as a Level I teacher to qualify for Level II.

5. Career Level III Teachers. Certification lasts five years, and the annual supplements are $3,000 for a 10-month contract, $5,000 for an 11-month contract, and $7,000 for a 12-month contract. Career Level III teachers will conduct evaluations of career level teachers who are employed in different school systems. A teacher must have taught as a Level II teacher for five years to qualify for Level III.

(Public Chapter No. 7, First Extraordinary Session of the 93rd General Assembly, State of Tennessee, as Amended by Chapter 829, Public Acts of 1984.)

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Considerable concern regarding the implementation of the career ladder program has been manifested among teachers and other school personnel. The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes of teachers in 25 school systems in Middle Tennessee concerning the Career Ladder Program.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

A questionnaire was distributed to 600 public school teachers in the Middle Tennessee geographic region. A total of 516 teachers completed and returned the questionnaire for an eighty-seven percent return rate. The Chi Square test of statistical significance was applied to the data. A descriptive presentation of the data follows:

1. The Career Ladder Program is an innovative effort to improve public education in Tennessee.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	62	378	23	53
Percent Responding	12	73	4	10

Chi Square 647.3023 .0001 Sig.

2. The Career Ladder Program will attract more qualified individuals to the teaching profession.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	189	112	215
Percent Responding	0	37	22	42

Chi Square 216.4806 .0001 Sig.

3. The Career Ladder Program is an incentive for educators to remain in the teaching profession.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	208	156	152
Percent Responding	0	40	30	29

Chi Square 187.1318 .0001 Sig.

4. The implementation of the Career Ladder Program will improve the quality of instruction.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	270	246	0
Percent Responding	0	52	48	0

Chi Square 518.2326 .0001 Sig.

5. Merit Pay (Levels II and III) will cause morale problems among individuals in the teaching profession.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	261	175	80	0
Percent Responding	51	34	15	0

Chi Square 299.0853 .0001 Sig.

6. The career levels II and III evaluation procedures have been professional and objective.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	73	68	300	75
Percent Responding	14	13	58	15

Chi Square 302.4341 .0001 Sig.

7. Fair, unbiased evaluation concerning career level pay supplements is likely to occur in my school system.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	110	298	108
Percent Responding	0	21	58	21

Chi Square 356.6202 .0001 Sig.

8. Those teachers who have applied for career level status are the better teachers in my school.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	0	218	298
Percent Responding	0	0	42	58

Chi Square 540.8062 .0001 Sig.

9. I am excited about my teaching career under the Career Ladder Program.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	156	0	360
Percent Responding	0	30	0	70

Chi Square 677.3023 .0001 Sig.

10. Adequate information has been made available to me concerning the Career Ladder Program.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	206	300	10	0
Percent Responding	40	58	2	0

Chi Square 511.4109 .0001 Sig.

11. The Career Ladder Program has had a positive influence on the overall effectiveness of my school.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	0	299	217
Percent Responding	0	0	58	42

Chi Square 542.0620 .0001 Sig.

12. I believe that parents understand and support the Career Ladder Program.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	87	386	43
Percent Responding	0	17	75	8

Chi Square 712.0155 .0001 Sig.

13. Teachers on career levels II and III (with increased salaries) should assume a proportionately greater share of school responsibilities.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	287	200	29	0
Percent Responding	56	39	6	0

Chi Square 439.1163 .0001 Sig.

14. The Career Ladder Program has made me a better teacher.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	220	185	111
Percent Responding	0	43	36	22

Chi Square 220.0155 .0001 Sig.

15. Teachers who have attained career levels II and III should help other teachers to become better teachers.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	53	411	42	0
Percent Responding	10	80	10	0

Chi Square 836.2016 .0001 Sig.

16. The Career Ladder Program has brought about improvements and revision in the curriculum in my school.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	150	180	186
Percent Responding	0	29	35	36

Chi Square 177.7674 .0001 Sig.

17. Prospective teachers should be required to pass a competency examination (basic skills) before licensure by the state.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	171	258	87	0
Percent Responding	33	50	17	0

Chi Square 289.3953 .0001 Sig.

18. Teachers should be required to pass tests periodically to measure knowledge and skills in their content area.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	114	289	113
Percent Responding	0	22	56	22

Chi Square 331.1783 .0001 Sig.

19. Those who evaluate teachers should receive special training in teacher evaluation.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	251	265	0	0
Percent Responding	49	51	0	0

Chi Square 258.0000 .0001 Sig.

20. The Career Ladder Program should be continued.

	SA	A	D	SD
Number of Respondents	0	230	286	0
Percent Responding	0	45	55	0

Chi Square 528.1550 .0001 Sig.

SUMMARY

The results of the study show that about half (52%) of the teachers believe that the Career Ladder Program will improve the quality of instruction in Tennessee Public Schools. However, most did not think that the Career Ladder Program would necessarily attract more qualified individuals into the teaching profession nor serve as an incentive for educators to remain in teaching. There was strong agreement (85%) that the program would cause morale problems because of the pay differentials. Over forty percent of the teachers stated that they had become better teachers because of the Career Ladder Program. Interestingly, some 83% of the teachers stated that perspective teachers should be required to pass a competency examination (basic skills) before licensure by the State. Conversely, the respondents did not believe that those presently teaching should be required to periodically pass a test measuring knowledge and skills in their content area. It should be noted that a majority of the teachers in the study did not report that fair evaluations were likely to occur in their school system. It was noted that 45% of the respondents agreed and 55% disagreed that the Career Ladder Program should be continued.

The Career Ladder Program has generated considerable interest and discussion among educators, politicians, and the general public. It will be interesting to observe future developments in the program.